

THE COLOUR OF LIFE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

ON THINGS SEEN AND HEARD

By the same Author

POEMS. Fcap 8vo

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LIFE, AND OTHER
ESSAYS. Fcap 8vo

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8vo

THE
COLOUR OF LIFE

AND OTHER ESSAYS
ON THINGS SEEN AND HEARD

BY
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to
COVENTRY PATMORE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. THE COLOUR OF LIFE	I
2. A POINT OF BIOGRAPHY	8
3. CLOUD	15
4. WINDS OF THE WORLD	23
5. THE HONOURS OF MORTALITY	30
6. AT MONASTERY GATES	32
7. RUSHES AND REEDS	40
8. ELEONORA DUSE	45
9. DONKEY RACES	53
10. GRASS	60
11. A WOMAN IN GREY	65
12. SYMMETRY AND INCIDENT	73
13. THE ILLUSION OF HISTORIC TIME	88
14. EYES	96


THE COLOUR OF LIFE



RED has been praised for its nobility as the colour of life. But the true colour of life is not red. Red is the colour of violence, or of life broken open, edited, and published. Or if red is indeed the colour of life, it is so only on condition that it is not seen. Once fully visible, red is the colour of life violated, and in the act of betrayal and of waste. Red is the secret of life, and not the manifestation thereof. It is one of the things the value of which is secrecy, one of the talents that are to be hidden in a napkin. The true colour of life is the colour of the body, the colour of the covered red, the implicit and not explicit red of the living heart and the pulses. It is the modest colour of the unpublished blood.

So bright, so light, so soft, so mingled, the gentle colour of life is ~~done~~ done by all

the colours of the world. Its very beauty is that it is white, but less white than milk; brown, but less brown than earth; red, but less red than sunset or dawn. It is lucid, but less lucid than the colour of lilies. It has the hint of gold that is in all fine colour; but in our latitudes the hint is almost elusive. Under Sicilian skies, indeed, it is deeper than old ivory; but under the misty blue of the English zenith, and the warm grey of the London horizon, it is as delicately flushed as the paler wild roses, out to their utmost, flat as stars, in the hedges of the end of June.

For months together London does not see the colour of life in any mass. The human face does not give much of it, what with features, and beards, and the shadow of the top-hat and *chapeau melon* of man, and of the veils of woman. Besides, the colour of the face is subject to a thousand injuries and accidents. The popular face of the Londoner has soon lost its gold, its white, and the delicacy of its red and brown. We miss little beauty by the fact that it is never seen freely in great numbers out-of-doors. You get it in so  quantity when all the heads

of a great indoor meeting are turned at once upon a speaker; but it is only in the open air, needless to say, that the colour of life is in perfection, in the open air, "clothed with the sun," whether the sunshine be golden and direct, or dazzlingly diffused in grey.

The little figure of the London boy it is that has restored to the landscape the human colour of life. He is allowed to come out of all his ignominies, and to take the late colour of the midsummer north-west evening, on the borders of the Serpentine. At the stroke of eight he sheds the slough of nameless colours—all allied to the hues of dust, soot, and fog, which are the colours the world has chosen for its boys—and he makes, in his hundreds, a bright and delicate flush between the grey-blue water and the grey-blue sky. Clothed now with the sun, he is crowned by-and-by with twelve stars as he goes to bathe, and the reflection of an early moon is under his feet.

So little stands between a gamin and all the dignities of Nature. They are so quickly restored. There seems to be nothing to do, but only a little thing to undo. It is like

the art of Eleonora Duse. The last and most finished action of her intellect, passion, and knowledge is, as it were, the flicking away of some insignificant thing mistaken for art by other actors, some little obstacle to the way and liberty of Nature.

All the squalor is gone in a moment, kicked off with the second boot, and the child goes shouting to complete the landscape with the lacking colour of life. You are inclined to wonder that, even undressed, he still shouts with a Cockney accent. You half expect pure vowels and elastic syllables from his restoration, his spring, his slenderness, his brightness, and his glow. Old ivory and wild rose in the deepening midsummer sun, he gives his colours to his world again.

It is easy to replace man, and it will take no great time, where Nature has lapsed, to replace Nature. It is always to do, by the happily easy way of doing nothing. The grass is always ready to grow in the streets—and no streets could ask for a more charming finish than your green grass. The gasometer even must fall to pieces unless it is renewed; but the grass renews itself. There is nothing so remediable as the work of modern man—

"a thought which is also," as Mr Pecksniff said, "very soothing." And by remediable I mean, of course, destructible. As the bathing child shuffles off his garments—they are few, and one brace suffices him—so the land might always, in reasonable time, shuffle off its yellow brick and purple slate, and all the things that collect about railway stations. A single night almost clears the air of London.

But if the colour of life looks so well in the rather sham scenery of Hyde Park, it looks brilliant and grave indeed on a real sea-coast. To have once seen it there should be enough to make a colourist. O memorable little picture! The sun was gaining colour as it neared setting, and it set not over the sea, but over the land. The sea had the dark and rather stern, but not cold, blue of that aspect—the dark and not the opal tints. The sky was also deep. Everything was very definite, without mystery, and exceedingly simple. The most luminous thing was the shining white of an edge of foam, which did not cease to be white because it was a little golden and a little rosy in the sunshine. It was still, the whitest thing

imaginable. And the next most luminous thing was the little child, also invested with the sun and the colour of life.

In the case of women, it is of the living and unpublished blood that the violent world has professed to be delicate and ashamed. See the curious history of the political rights of woman under the Revolution. On the scaffold she enjoyed an ungrudged share in the fortunes of party. Political life might be denied her, but that seems a trifle when you consider how generously she was permitted political death. She was to spin and cook for her citizen in the obscurity of her living hours; but to the hour of her death was granted a part in the largest interests, social, national, international. The blood wherewith she should, according to Robespierre, have blushed to be seen or heard in the tribune, was exposed in the public sight unsheltered by her veins.

Against this there was no modesty. Of all privacies, the last and the innermost—the privacy of death—was never allowed to put obstacles in the way of public action for a public cause. Women might be, and were, duly suppressed when, by the mouth of Olympe

de Gouges, they claimed a "right to concur in the choice of representatives for the formation of the laws"; but in her person, too, they were liberally allowed to bear political responsibility to the Republic. Olympe de Gouges was guillotined. Robespierre thus made her public and complete amends.

A POINT OF BIOGRAPHY

THERE is hardly a writer now—of the third class probably not one—who has not something sharp and sad to say about the cruelty of Nature; not one who is able to attempt May in the woods without a modern reference to the manifold death and destruction with which the air, the branches, the mosses are said to be full.

But no one has paused in the course of these phrases to take notice of the curious and conspicuous fact of the suppression of death and of the dead throughout this landscape of manifest life. Where are they—all the dying, all the dead, of the populous woods? Where do they hide their little last hours, where are they buried? Where is violence concealed? Under what gay form and decent habit? You may see, it were, an earth-worm in a robin's beak, may hear a thrush breaking a snail's

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shell; but these little things are, as it were, passed by with a kind of twinkle for apology, as by a well-bred man who does openly some little solecism which is too slight for direct mention, and which a meaner man might hide or avoid. Unless you are very modern indeed, you twinkle back at the bird.

But otherwise there is nothing visible of the havoc and the prey and plunder. It is certain that much of the visible life passes violently into other forms; flashes without pause into another flame; but not all. Amid all the killing there must be much dying. There are, for instance, few birds of prey left in our more accessible counties now, and *many thousands of birds must die uncaught by a hawk and unpierced*. But if their killing is done so modestly, so then is their dying also. Short lives have all these wild things, but there are innumerable flocks of them always alive; they must die, then, in innumerable flocks. And yet they keep the millions of the dead out of sight.

Now and then, indeed, they may be betrayed. It happened in a cold winter. The late frosts were so sudden, and the famine

was so complete, that the birds were taken unawares. The sky and the earth conspired that February to make known all the secrets; everything was published. Death was manifest. Editors, when a great man dies, are not more resolute than was the frost of '95.

The birds were obliged to die in public. They were surprised and forced to do thus. They became like Shelley in the monument which the art and imagination of England combined to raise to his memory at Oxford.

Frost was surely at work in both cases, and in both it wrought wrong. There is a similarity of unreason in betraying the death of a bird and in exhibiting the death of Shelley. The death of a soldier—*passe encore*. But the death of Shelley was not his goal. And the death of the birds is so little characteristic of them that, as has just been said, no one in the world is aware of their dying, except only in the case of birds in cages, who, again, are compelled to die with observation. The woodland is guarded and kept by a rule. There is no display of the battlefield in the fields. There is no tale of the game-bag, no boast. The hunting goes on, but with strange decorum. You

may pass a fine season under the trees, and see nothing dead except here and there where a boy has been by, or a man with a trap, or a man with a gun. There is nothing like a butcher's shop in the woods.

But the biographers have always had other ways than those of the wild world. They will not have a man to die out of sight. I have turned over scores of "Lives," not to read them, but to see whether now and again there might be a "Life" which was not more emphatically a death. But there never is a modern biography that has taken the hint of Nature. One and all, these books have the disproportionate illness, the death out of all scale.

Even more wanton than the disclosure of a death is that of a mortal illness. If the man had recovered, his illness would have been rightly his own secret. But because he did not recover, it is assumed to be news for the first comer. Which of us would suffer the details of any physical suffering, over and done in our own lives, to be displayed and described? This is not a confidence we have a mind to make; and no one is authorised to ask for attention or pity on our behalf.

The story of pain ought not to be told of us, seeing that by us it would assuredly not be told.

There is only one other thing that concerns a man still more exclusively, and that is his own mental illness, or the dreams and illusions of a long delirium. When he is in common language not himself, amends should be made for so bitter a paradox; he should be allowed such solitude as is possible to the alienated spirit; he should be left to the "not himself," and spared the intrusion against which he can so ill guard that he could hardly have even resented it.

The double helplessness of delusion and death should keep the door of Rossetti's house, for example, and refuse him to the reader. His mortal illness had nothing to do with his poetry. Some rather affected objection is taken every now and then to the publication of some facts (others being already well known) in the life of Shelley. Nevertheless, these are all, properly speaking, biography. What is not biography is the detail of the accident of the manner of his death, the detail of his cremation. Or if it was to be told—told briefly it was certain-

not for marble. Shelley's death had no significance, except inasmuch as he died young. It was a detachable and disconnected incident. Ah, that was a frost of fancy and of the heart that used it so, dealing with an insignificant fact, and conferring a futile immortality. Those are ill-named biographers who seem to think that a betrayal of the ways of death is a part of their ordinary duty, and that if material enough for a last chapter does not lie to their hand they are to search it out. They, of all survivors, are called upon, in honour and reason, to look upon a death with more composure. To those who loved the dead closely, this is, for a time, impossible. To them death becomes, for a year, disproportionate. Their dreams are fixed upon it night by night. They have, in those dreams, to find the dead in some labyrinth; they have to mourn his dying and to welcome his recovery in such a mingling of distress and of always incredulous happiness as is not known even to dreams save in that first year of separation. But they are not biographers.

- If death is the privacy of the woods, it is the more conspicuously secret because it is

their only privacy. You may watch or may surprise everything else. The nest is retired, not hidden. The chase goes on everywhere. It is wonderful how the perpetual chase seems to cause no perpetual fear. The songs are all audible. Life is undefended, careless, nimble and noisy.

It is a happy thing that minor artists have ceased, or almost ceased, to paint dead birds. Time was when they did it continually in that British School of water-colour art, stippled, of which surrounding nations, it was agreed, were envious. They must have killed their bird to paint him, for he is not to be caught dead. A bird is more easily caught alive than dead.

A poet, on the contrary, is easily — too easily — caught dead. Minor artists now seldom stipple the bird on its back, but a good sculptor and a University together modelled their Shelley on his back, unessentially drowned; and everybody may read about the sick mind of Dante Rossetti.

CLOUD

DURING a part of the year London does not see the clouds. Not to see the clear sky might seem her chief loss, but that is shared by the rest of England, and is, besides, but a slight privation. Not to see the clear sky is, elsewhere, to see the cloud. But, not so in London. You may go for a week or two at a time, even though you hold your head up as you walk, and even though you have windows that really open, and yet you shall see no cloud, or but a single edge, the fragment of a form.

Guillotine windows never wholly open, but are filled with a doubled glass towards the sky when you open them towards the street. They are, therefore, a sure sign that of the years when no other windows were grave in London, nobody there cared much for the sky, or even knew so much as what second-hand beauty is.

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But the privation of cloud is indeed a graver loss than the world knows. Terrestrial scenery is much, but it is not all. Men go in search of it; but the celestial scenery journeys to them. It goes its way round the world. It has no nation, it costs no weariness, it knows no bonds. The terrestrial scenery—the tourist's—is a prisoner compared with this. The tourist's scenery moves indeed, but only like Wordsworth's maiden, with earth's diurnal course; it is made as fast as its own graves. And for its changes it depends upon the mobility of the skies. The mere green flushing of its own sap makes only the least of its varieties; for the greater it must wait upon the visits of the light. Spring and autumn are inconsiderable events in a landscape compared with the shadows of a cloud.

The cloud controls the light, and the mountains on earth appear or fade according to its passage: they wear so simply, from head to foot, the luminous grey or the emphatic about, as the cloud permits, that their own cheer and their own local season are ever, effaced before the all-important, the cloud.

as no mood except that of the

sky and of its winds. It is the cloud that, holding the sun's rays in a sheaf as a giant holds a handful of spears, strikes the horizon, touches the extreme edge with a delicate revelation of light, or suddenly puts it out and makes the foreground shine.

Every one knows the manifest work of the cloud when it descends and partakes in the landscape obviously, lies half-way across the mountain slope, stoops to rain heavily upon the lake, and blots out part of the view by the rough method of standing in front of it. But its greatest things are done from its own place, aloft. Thence does it distribute the sun.

Thence does it lock away between the hills and valleys more mysteries than a poet conceals, but, like him, not by interception. Thence it writes out and cancels all the tracery of Monte Rosa, or lets the pencils of the sun renew them. Thence, hiding nothing, and yet making dark, it sheds deep colour upon the forest land of Sussex, so that, seen from the hills, all the country is divided between grave blue and graver sunlight.

And all this is but its influence, its secondary work upon the world. Its own beauty is

unaltered when it has no earthly beauty to improve. It is always great: above the street, above the suburbs, above the gas-works and the stucco, above the faces of painted white houses—the painted surfaces that have been devised as the only things able to vulgarise light, as they catch it and reflect it grotesquely from their importunate gloss. This is to be well seen on a sunny evening in Regent Street.

Even here the cloud is not so victorious as when it towers above some little landscape of rather paltry interest—a conventional river heavy with water, gardens with their little evergreens, walks, and shrubberies; and thick trees, impervious to the light, touched, as the novelists always have it, with “autumn tints.” High over these rises, in the enormous realm of the scenery of clouds, what no man expected—an heroic sky. Few of the things that were ever done upon earth are great enough to be done under such a heaven. It about¹ surely designed for other days. It is for² world. Your eyes sweep a thousand³ cloud. What are the distances of these, and what are the distances of ear and cloudless sky? The very

horizons of the landscape are near, for the round world dips so soon; and the distances of the mere clear sky are unmeasured—you rest upon nothing until you come to a star, and the star itself is immeasurable.

But in the sky of “sunny Alps” of clouds the sight goes farther, with conscious flight, than it could ever have journeyed otherwise. Man would not have known distance veritably without the clouds. There are mountains indeed, precipices and deeps, to which those of the earth are pigmy. Yet the sky-heights, being so far off, are not overpowering by disproportion, like some futile building fatuously made too big for the human measure. The cloud in its majestic place composes with a little Perugino tree. For you stand or stray in the futile building, while the cloud is no mansion for man, and out of reach of his limitations.

The cloud, moreover, controls the sun, not merely by keeping the custody of his rays, but by becoming the counsellor of his temper. The cloud veils an angry sun, or, more terribly, lets fly an angry ray, suddenly bright upon tree and tower, with iron-grey storm for a background. Or when anger had but threat-

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ened, the cloud reveals him, gentle beyond hope. It makes peace, constantly, just before sunset.

It is in the confidence of the winds, and wears their colours. There is a heavenly game, on south-west wind days, when the clouds are bowled by a breeze from behind the evening. They are round and brilliant, and come leaping up from the horizon for hours. This is a frolic and haphazard sky.

All unlike this is the sky that has a centre, and stands composed about it. As the clouds marshalled the earthly mountains, so the clouds in turn are now ranged. The tops of all the celestial Andes aloft are swept at once by a single ray, warmed with a single colour. Promontory after league-long promontory of a stiller Mediterranean in the sky is called out of mist and grey by the same finger. The cloudland is very great, but a sunbeam makes all its nations and continents sudden with light.

All this is for the untravelled. All the winds bring him this scenery. It is only in London, for part of the autumn and part of the winter, that the unnatural smoke-fog comes between. And for many and many a day no

eye can see the horizon, or the first threat of the cloud like a man's hand. There never was a great painter who had not exquisite horizons, and if Corot and Crome were right, the Londoner loses a great thing.

He loses the coming of the cloud, and when it is high in air he loses its shape. A cloud-lover is not content to see a snowy and rosy head piling into the top of the heavens; he wants to see the base and the altitude. The perspective of a cloud is a great part of its design—whether it lies so that you can look along the immense horizontal distances of its floor, or whether it rears so upright a pillar that you look up its mountain steeps in the sky as you look at the rising heights of a mountain that stands, with you, on the earth.

The cloud has a name suggesting darkness; nevertheless, it is not merely the guardian of the sun's rays and their director. It is the sun's treasurer; it holds the light that the world has lost. We talk of sunshine and moonshine, but not of cloud-shine, which is yet one of the illuminations of our skies. A shining cloud is one of the most majestic of


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all secondary lights. If the reflecting moon is the bride, this is the friend of the bridegroom.

Needless to say, the cloud of a thunderous summer is the most beautiful of all. It has spaces of a grey for which there is no name, and no other cloud looks over at a vanishing sun from such heights of blue air. The shower-cloud, too, with its thin edges, comes across the sky with so influential a flight that no ship going out to sea can be better worth watching. The dullest thing perhaps in the London streets is that people take their rain there without knowing anything of the cloud that drops it. It is merely rain, and means wetness. The shower-cloud there has limits of time, but no limits of form, and no history whatever. It has not come from the clear edge of the plain to the south, and will not shoulder anon the hill to the north. The rain, for this city, hardly comes or goes; it does but begin and stop. No one looks after it on the path of its retreat.

WINDS OF THE WORLD

VERY wind is, or ought to be, a poet; but one is classic and converts everything in his day to unity; another is a modern man, whose words clothe his thoughts, as the modern critics used to say prettily in the early sixties, and therefore are separable. This wind, again, has a style, and that wind a mere manner. Nay, there are breezes from the east-south-east, for example, that have hardly even a manner. You can hardly name them unless you look at the weather vane. So they do not convince you by voice or colour of breath; you place their origin and assign them a history according as the hesitating arrow points on the top of yonder ill-designed London spire.

The most certain and most conquering of all is the south-west wind. You do not look to the weather-vane to decide what shall be

the style of your greeting to his morning. There is no arbitrary rule of courtesy between you and him, and you need no arrow to point to his distinctions, and to indicate to you the right manner of treating such a visitant.

He prepares the dawn. While it is still dark the air is warned of his presence, and before the window was opened he was already in the room. His sun—for the sun is his—rises in a south-west mood, with a bloom or the blue, the grey, or the gold. When the south-west is cold, the cold is his own cold—round, blunt, full, and gradual in its very strength. It is a fresh cold, that comes with an approach, and does not challenge you in the manner of an unauthorised stranger, but instantly gets your leave, and even a welcome to your house of life. He follows your breath in at your throat, and your eyes are open to let him in, even when he is cold. Your blood cools, but does not hide from him.

He has a splendid way with his sky. In his flight, which is that, not of a bird, but of a flock of birds, he flies high and low at once: high with his higher clouds, that keep long in the sight of man, seeming to move slowly; and low with the coloured clouds that breast

the hills and are near to the tree-tops. These the south-west wind tosses up from his soft horizon, round and successive. They are tinted somewhat like ripe clover-fields, or like hay-fields just before the cutting, when all the grass is in flower, and they are, oftener than all other clouds, in shadow. These low-lying flocks are swift and brief; the wind casts them before him, from the western verge to the eastern.

Corot has painted so many south-west winds that one might question whether he ever painted, in his later manner at least, any others. His skies are thus in the act of flight, with lower clouds outrunning the higher, the farther vapours moving like a fleet out at sea, and the nearer like dolphins. In his "Classical Landscape: Italy," the master has indeed for once a sky that seems at anchor, or at least that moves with "no pace perceived." The vibrating wings are folded, and Corot's wind, that flew through so many springs, summers, and Septembers for him (he was seldom a painter of very late autumn), that was mingled with so many aspen-leaves, that strewed his forests with wood for the gatherer, and blew the broken lights into the glades, is charmed into stillness, and the sky

which he gives to the day is not all his own. The sunshine is sweet in spite of him. The clouds go under his whip, but they have kinder greys than should be the colours of his cold. Not on an east-wind day are these races in heaven, for the clouds are all far off. His rain is angry, and it flies against the sunset. The world is not one in his reign, but rather there is a perpetual revolt or difference. The lights and shadows are not all his. The waxing and waning hours are disaffected. He has not a great style, and does not convince the day.

All the four winds are brave, and not the less brave because, on their way through town, they are betrayed for a moment into taking part in any paltriness that may be there. On their way from the Steppes to the Atlantic they play havoc the nerves of very insignificant people. A part, as it were, of every gale that starts in the far north-east finds its goal in the breath of a reluctant citizen.

You will meet a wind of the world nimble and eager in a sorry street. But these are only accidents of the way—the winds go free again. Those that do not go free, but close

their course, are those that are breathed by the nostrils of living creatures. A great flock of those wild birds come to a final pause in London, and fan the fires of life with those wings in the act of folding. In the blood and breath of a child close the influences of continent and sea.

THE HONOURS OF MORTALITY

THE brilliant talent which has quite lately and quite suddenly arisen, to devote itself to the use of the day or of the week, in illustrated papers—the enormous production of art in black and white—is assuredly a confession that the Honours of Mortality are worth working for. Fifty years ago, men worked for the honours of immortality; these were the commonplace of their ambition; they declined to attend to the beauty of things of use that were destined to be broken and worn out, and they looked forward to surviving themselves by painting bad pictures; so that what to do with their bad pictures in addition to our own has become the problem of the nation and of the householder alike. To-day men have begun to learn that their sons will be grateful to them for few bequests. Art consents at last to work upon

the tissue and the china that are doomed to the natural and necessary end—destruction; and art shows a most dignified alacrity to do her best, daily, for the “process,” and for oblivion.

Doubtless this abandonment of hopes so large at once and so cheap costs the artist something; nay, it implies an acceptance of the inevitable that is not less than heroic. And the reward has been in the singular and manifest increase of vitality in this work which is done for so short a life. Fittingly indeed does life reward the acceptance of death, inasmuch as to die is to have been alive. There is a real circulation of blood—quick use, brief beauty, abolition, recreation. *The honour of the day is for ever the honour of that day.* It goes into the treasury of things that are honestly and completely ended and done with. And when can so happy a thing be said of a lifeless oil-painting? Who of the wise would hesitate? To be honourable for one day—one named and dated day, separate from all other days of the ages—or to be for an unlimited time tedious?

AT MONASTERY GATES



NO woman has ever crossed the inner threshold, or shall ever cross it, unless a queen, English or foreign, should claim her privilege. Therefore, if a woman records here the slighter things visible of the monastic life, it is only because she was not admitted to see more than beautiful courtesy and friendliness were able to show her in guest-house and garden.

The Monastery is of fresh-looking Gothic by Pugin — the first of the dynasty: it is reached by the white roads of a limestone country, and backed by a young plantation, and it gathers its group of buildings in a cleft high up among the hills of Wales. The brown habit is this, and these are the sandals, that come and go by hills of finer, sharper, and loftier line, edging the dusk and dawn of an Umbrian sky. Just such a Via Crucis climbs the height above Orta, and from the foot of

its final crucifix you can see the sunrise touch the top of Monte Rosa, while the encircled lake below is cool with the last of the night. The same order of friars keep that sub-Alpine Monte Sacro, and the same have set the Kreuzberg beyond Bonn with the same steep path by the same fourteen chapels, facing the Seven Mountains and the Rhine.

Here, in North Wales, remote as the country is, with the wheat green over the blunt hill-tops, and the sky vibrating with larks, a long wing of smoke lies round the horizon. The country, rather thinly and languidly cultivated above, has a valuable sub-soil, and is burrowed with mines; the breath of pit and factory, out of sight, thickens the lower sky, and lies heavily over the sands of Dee. It leaves the upper blue clear and the head of Orion, but dims the flicker of Sirius and shortens the steady ray of the evening star. The people scattered about are not mining people, but half-hearted agriculturists, and very poor. Their cottages are rather cabins; not a tiled roof is in the country, but the slates have taken some beauty with time, having dips and dimples, and grass upon their edges. The


walls are all thickly whitewashed, which is a pleasure to see. How willingly would one swish the harmless whitewash over more than half the colour—over all the chocolate and all the blue—with which the buildings of the world are stained! You could not wish for a better, simpler, or fresher harmony than whitewash makes with the slight sunshine and the bright grey of an English sky.

The grey-stone, grey-roofed monastery looks young in one sense—it is modern; and the friars look young in another—they are like their brothers of an earlier time. No one, except the journalists of yesterday, would spend upon them those tedious words, “quaint,” or “old world.” No such weary adjectives are spoken here, unless it be by the excursionists.

With large aprons tied over their brown habits, the Lay Brothers work upon their land, planting parsnips in rows, or tending a prosperous bee-farm. A young friar, who sang the High Mass yesterday, is gaily hanging the washed linen in the sun. A printing press, and a machine which slices turnips, are at work in an outhouse, and the yard thereby is guarded by a St Bernard, whose

single evil deed was that under one of the obscure impulses of a dog's heart—atoned for by long and self-conscious remorse—he bit the poet; and tried, says one of the friars, to make doggerel of him. The poet, too, lives at the monastery gates, and on monastery ground, in a seclusion which the tidings of the sequence of his editions hardly reaches. There is no disturbing renown to be got among the cabins of the Flintshire hills. Homeward, over the verge, from other valleys, his light figure flits at nightfall, like a moth.

To the coming and going of the friars, too, the village people have become well used, and the infrequent excursionists, for lack of intelligence and of any knowledge that would refer to history, look at them without obtrusive curiosity. It was only from a Salvation Army girl that you heard the brutal word of contempt. She had come to the place with some companions, and with them was trespassing, as she was welcome to do, within the monastery grounds. She stood, a figure for Bournemouth pier, in her grotesque bonnet, and watched the son of the Umbrian saint—the friar who walks



among the Giotto frescoes at Assisi and between the cypresses of Bello Sguardo, and has paced the centuries continually since the coming of the friars. One might have asked of her the kindness of a fellow-feeling. She and he alike were so habited as to show the world that their life was aloof from its "idle business." By some such phrase, at least, the friar would assuredly have attempted to include her in any spiritual honours ascribed to him. Or one might have asked of her the condescension of forbearance. "Only fancy," said the Salvation Army girl, watching the friar out of sight, "only fancy making such a fool of one's self!"

The great hood of the friars, which is drawn over the head in Zurbaran's ecstatic picture, is turned to use when the friars are busy. As a pocket it relieves the overburdened hands. A bottle of the local white wine, made by the brotherhood at Genoa, and sent to this house by the West, is carried in the cowl as a present to the stranger at the gates. The friars tell how a brother resolved, at Shrovetide, to make pancakes, and not only to make, but also to toss them. Those who chanced to be in

the room stood perfectly still, and the brother bowed humbly. But that was the last that was seen of his handiwork. Victor then came to the *Exercice des Vœux* of disapprobation as the thing which no creature is able to achieve: here the impossibility seemed to be accomplished by quite an ordinary and a simple passage. It was clean gone, and there was an end of it. Nor could any explanation of the crossing of a passage from the midst of the visible world be so much as desired by the spectators. It was only when the brother, in church, knelt down to meditate and drew his coat about his head that the accident was explained.

Every midnight the sweet canticle bells call the community, who get up gaily to this difficult service. Of all duties this one never grows easy or familiar, and therefore never habitual. It is something to have found but not set aloof from habit. It is not merely that the friars overcome the habit of sleep. The subtler point is that they can never acquire the habit of sacrificing sleep. What art, what literature, or what life but would gain a secret security by such a point of perpetual freshness and perpetual initiative?

It is not possible to get up at midnight without a will that is new night by night. So should the writer's work be done, and, with an intention perpetually unique, the poet's.

The contralto bells have taught these Western hills the "Angelus" of the French fields, and the hour of night—*l'ora di notte*—which rings with so melancholy a note from the village belfries on the Adriatic littoral, when the latest light is passing. It is the prayer for the dead: "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord."

The little flocks of novices, on paschal evenings, are folded to the sound of that evening prayer. The care of them is the central work of the monastery, which is placed in so remote a country because it is principally a place of studies. So much elect intellect and strength of heart withdrawn from the traffic of the world! True, the friars are not doing the task which Carlyle set mankind as a refuge from despair. These "bearded counsellors of God" keep their cells, read, study, suffer, sing, hold silence; whereas they might be "operating"—beautiful word!—upon the Stock Exchange,

or painting Academy pictures, or making speeches, or reluctantly jostling other men for places. They might be among the involuntary busybodies who are living by futile tasks the need whereof is a discouraged fiction. There is absolutely no limit to the superfluous activities, to the art, to the literature, implicitly renounced by the dwellers within such walls as these. The output—again a beautiful word—of the age is lessened by this abstention. None the less hopes the stranger and pilgrim to pause and knock once again upon those monastery gates.

RUSHES AND REEDS

TALLER than the grass and lower than the trees, there is another growth that feels the implicit spring. It had been more abandoned to winter than even the short grass shuddering under a wave of east wind, more than the dumb trees. For the multitudes of sedges, rushes, canes, and reeds were the appropriate lyre of the cold. On them the nimble winds played their dry music. They were part of the winter. It looked through them and spoke through them. They were spears and javelins in array to the sound of the drums of the north.

The winter takes fuller possession of these things than of those that stand solid. The sedges whistle his tune. They let the colour of his light look through—low-flying arrows and bright bayonets of winter day.

The multitudes of all reeds and rushes

grow out of bounds. They belong to the margins of lands, the space between the farms and the river, beyond the pastures, and where the marsh in flower becomes perilous footing for the cattle. They are the fringe of the low lands, the sign of streams. They grow tall between you and the near horizon of flat lands. They etch their sharp lines upon the sky; and near them grow flowers of stature, including the lofty yellow lily.

Our green country is the better for the grey, soft, cloudy darkness of the sedge, and our full landscape is the better for the distinction of its points, its needles, and its resolute right lines.

Ours is a summer full of voices, and therefore it does not so need the sound of rushes; but they are most sensitive to the stealthy breezes, and betray the passing of a wind that even the tree-tops knew not of. Sometimes it is a breeze unfelt, but the stiff sedges whisper it along a mile of marsh. To the strong wind they bend, showing the silver of their sombre little tassels as fish show the silver of their sides turning in the pathless sea. They are unanimous. A field

of tall flowers loses many ways in one wave-gale, like the many lovers of a poet who have a thousand reasons for their love; but the rushes, more strongly tethered, are swept into a single attitude, again and again, at every renewal of the storm.

Between the pasture and the wave, the many miles of rushes and reeds in England seem to escape that insistent ownership which has so changed (except for a few forests and downs) the aspect of England and has in fact made the landscape. Cultivation makes the landscape elsewhere, rather than ownership, for the boundaries in the south are not conspicuous; but here it is ownership. But the rushes are a gipsy people, amongst us, yet out of reach. The landowner, if he is rather a gross man, believes these races of reeds are his. But if he is a man of sensibility, depend upon it he has his interior doubts. His property, he says, goes right down to the centre of the earth, in the shape of a wedge; how high up it goes into the air it would be difficult to say, and obviously the shape of the wedge must be continued in the direction of increase. We may therefore pro-

. . . /

claim his right to the clouds and their cargo. It is true that as his ground game is apt to go upon his neighbour's land to be shot, so the clouds may now and then spend his showers elsewhere. But the great thing is the view. A well-appointed country-house sees nothing out of the windows that is not its own. But he who tells you so, and proves it to you by his own view, is certainly disturbed by an unspoken doubt, if his otherwise contented eyes should happen to be caught by a region of rushes. The water is his—he had the pond made; or the river, for a space, and the fish, for a time. But the bulrushes, the reeds! One wonders whether a very thorough landowner, but a sensitive one, ever resolved that he would endure this sort of thing no longer, and went out armed and had a long acre of sedges scythed to death.

They are probably outlaws. They are dwellers upon thresholds and upon margins, as the gipsies make a home upon the green edges of a road. No wild flowers, however wild, are rebels. The copses and their primroses are good subjects, the oaks are loyal. Now and then though one has a kind of

suspicion of some of the other kinds of trees—the Corot trees. Standing at a distance from the more ornamental trees, from those of fuller foliage, and from all the indeciduous shrubs and the conifers (manifest property, every one), two or three translucent aspens, with which the very sun and the breath of earth are entangled, have sometimes seemed to wear a certain look—an extra-territorial look, let us call it. They are suspect. One is inclined to shake a doubtful head at them.

And the landowner feels it. He knows quite well, though he may not say so, that the Corot trees, though they do not dwell upon margins, are in spirit almost as extra-territorial as the rushes. In proof of this he very often cuts them down, out of the view, once for all. The view is better, as a view, without them. Though their roots are in his ground right enough, there is a something about their heads——. But the reason he gives for wishing them away is merely that they are “thin.” A man does not always say everything.

ELEONORA DUSE



THE Italian woman is very near to Nature ; so is true drama.

Acting is not to be judged like some other of the arts, and praised for a "noble convention." Painting, indeed, is not praised amiss with that word ; painting is obviously an art that exists by its convention—the convention is the art. But far otherwise is it with the art of acting, where there is no representative material ; where, that is, the man is his own material, and there is nothing between. With the actor the style is the man, in another, a more immediate, and a more obvious sense than was ever intended by that saying. Therefore we may allow the critic—and not accuse him of reaction—to speak of the division between art and Nature in the painting of a landscape, but we cannot let him say the same things of acting. Acting has a technique, but no convention.

It runs up into the high notes of indifference, or, higher still, into those of *ennui*, as in the earlier scenes of *Divorçons*; or it grows sweet as summer with joy, or cracks and breaks outright, out of all music, and out of all control. Passion breaks it so for her.

As for her inarticulate sounds, which are the more intimate and the truer words of her meaning, they, too, are Italian and natural. English women, for instance, do not make them. They are sounds *à bouche fermée*, at once private and irrepressible. They are not demonstrations intended for the ears of others; they are her own. Other actresses, even English, and even American, know how to make inarticulate cries, with open mouth; Signora Duse's noise is not a cry; it is her very thought audible—the thought of the woman she is playing, who does not at every moment give exact words to her thought, but does give it significant sound.

When *la femme de Claude* is trapped by the man who has come in search of the husband's secret, and when she is obliged to sit and listen to her own evil history as he tells it her, she does not interrupt the telling with the outcries that might be imagined by a

lesser actress, she accompanies it. Her lips are close, but her throat is vocal. None who heard it can forget the speech-within-speech of one of these comprehensive noises. It was when the man spoke, for her further confusion, of the slavery to which she had reduced her lovers; she followed him, aloof, with a twang of triumph.


If Parisians say, as they do, that she makes a bad Parisienne, it is because she can be too nearly a woman untamed. They have accused her of lack of elegance—in that supper scene of *La Dame aux Camélias*, for instance; taking for ill-breeding, in her *Marguerite*, that which is Italian merely and simple. Whether, again, *Cyprienne*, in *Divorçons*, can at all be considered a lady may be a question; but this is quite unquestionable—that she is rather more a lady, and not less, when Signora Duse makes her a savage. But really the result is not at all Parisian.

It seems possible that the French sense does not well distinguish, and has no fine perception of that affinity with the peasant which remains with the great ladies of the old nation of Italy, and has so long dis-

appeared from those of the younger civilisations of France and England—a paradox. The peasant's gravity, directness, and carelessness—a kind of uncouthness which is neither graceless nor, in any intolerable English sense, vulgar—are to be found in the unceremonious moments of every cisalpine woman, however elect her birth and select her conditions. In Italy the lady is not a creature described by negatives, as an author who is always right has defined the lady to be in England. Even in France she is not that, and between the Frenchwoman and the Italian there are the Alps. In a word, the educated Italian *mondaine* is, in the sense (also untranslatable) of singular, insular, and absolutely British usage, a Native. None the less would she be surprised to find herself accused of a lack of dignity.

As to intelligence—a little intelligence is sufficiently dramatic, if it is single. A child doing one thing at a time and doing it completely, produces to the eye a better impression of mental life than one receives from—well, from a lecturer.

DONKEY RACES

 ENGLISH acting had for some time past still been making a feint of running the race that wins. The retort, the interruption, the call, the reply, the surprise, had yet kept a spoilt tradition of suddenness and life. You had, indeed, to wait for an interruption in dialogue—it is true you had to wait for it; so had the interrupted speaker on the stage. But when the interruption came, it had still a false air of vivacity; and the waiting of the interrupted one was so ill done, with so roving an eye and such an arrest and failure of convention, such a confession of a blank, as to prove that there remained a kind of reluctant and inexperienced sense of movement. It still seemed as though the actor and the actress acknowledged some forward tendency.

Not so now. The serious stage is openly the scene of the race that loses. The donkey

race is candidly the model of the talk in every tragedy that has a chance of popular success. Who shall be last? The hands of the public are for him, or for her. A certain actress who has "come to the front of her profession" holds, for a time, the record of delay. "Come to the front," do they say? Surely the front of her profession must have moved in retreat, to gain upon her tardiness. It must have become the back of her profession before ever it came up with her.

It should rejoice those who enter for this kind of racing that the record need never finally be beaten. The possibilities of success are incalculable. The play has perforce to be finished in a night, it is true, but the minor characters, the subordinate actors, can be made to bear the burden of that necessity. The principals, or those who have come "to the front of their profession," have an almost unlimited opportunity and liberty of lagging.

Besides, the competitor in a donkey race is not, let it be borne in mind, limited to the practice of his own tediousness. Part of his victory is to be ascribed to his influence upon others. It may be that a determined actor—a man of more than common strength

of will—may so cause his colleague to get on (let us say “get on,” for everything in this world is relative); may so, then, compel the other actor, with whom he is in conversation, to get on, as to secure his own final triumph by indirect means as well as by direct. To be plain, for the sake of those unfamiliar with the sports of the village, the rider in a donkey race may, and does, cudgel the mounts of his rivals.

Consider, therefore, how encouraging the prospect really is. The individual actor may fail—in fact, he must. Where two people ride together on horseback, the married have ever been warned, one must ride behind. And when two people are speaking slowly one must needs be the slowest. Comparative success implies the comparative failure. But where this actor or that actress fails, the great cause of slowness profits, obviously. The record is advanced. Pshaw! the word “advanced” comes unadvised to the pen. It is difficult to remember in what a fatuous theatrical Royal Presence one is doing this criticism, and how one’s words should go backwards, without exception, in homage to this symbol of a throne.

It is not long since there took place upon the principal stage in London the most important event in donkey-racing ever known until that first night. A tragedian and a secondary actor of renown had a duet together. It was in "The Dead Heart." No one who heard it can possibly have yet forgotten it. The two men used echoes of one another's voice, then outpaused each other. It was a contest so determined, so unrelaxed, so deadly, so inveterate that you might have slept between its encounters. You did sleep. These men were strong men, and knew what they wanted. It is tremendous to watch the struggle of such resolves. They had their purpose in their grasp, their teeth were set, their will was iron. They were foot to foot.

And next morning you saw by the papers that the secondary, but still renowned, actor, had succeeded in sharing the principal honours of the piece. So uncommonly well had he done, even for him. Then you understood that, though you had not known it, the tragedian must have been beaten in that dialogue. He had suffered himself in an instant of weakness, to be stimulated; he had for a moment—only a moment—got on.

That night was influential. We may see its results everywhere, and especially in Shakespeare. Our tragic stage was always—well, different, let us say—different from the tragic stage of Italy and France. It is now quite unlike, and frankly so. The spoilt tradition of vitality has been explicitly abandoned. The interrupted one waits, no longer with a roving eye, but with something almost of dignity, as though he were fulfilling ritual.

Benvolio and Mercutio outlag one another in hunting after the leaping Romeo. They call without the slightest impetus. One can imagine how the true Mercutio called—certainly not by rote. There must have been pauses indeed, brief and short-breath'd pauses of listening for an answer, between every nickname. But the nicknames were quick work. At the Lyceum they were quite an effort of memory: "Romeo! Humours! Madman! Passion! Lover!"

The actress of Juliet, speaking the words of haste, makes her audience wait to hear them. Nothing more incongruous than Juliet's hurry of phrase and the actress's leisurely phrasing. None act, none speak, as though there were such a thing as impetuosity.

GRASS

NOW and then, at regular intervals of the summer, the Suburb springs for a time from its mediocrity; but an inattentive eye might not see why, or might not seize the cause of the bloom and of the new look of humility and dignity that makes the Road, the Rise, and the Villas seem suddenly gentle, gay and rather shy.

It is no change in the gardens. These are, as usual, full, abundant, fragrant, and quite uninteresting, keeping the traditional secret by which the suburban rose, magnolia, clematis, and all other flowers grow dull—not in colour, but in spirit—between the yellow brick house-front and the iron railings. Nor is there anything altered for the better in the houses themselves.

Nevertheless, the little, common, prosperous road, has bloomed, you cannot tell how. It is unexpectedly liberal, fresh, and innocent. The

soft garden-winds that rustle its shrubs are, for the moment, genuine.

Another day and all is undone. The Rise is its daily self again—a road of flowers and foliage that is less pleasant than a fairly well-built street. And if you happen to find the men at work on the re-transformation, you become aware of the accident that made all this difference. It lay in the little border of wayside grass which a row of public servants—men with spades and a cart—are in the act of tidying up. Their way of tidying it up is to lay its little corpse all along the suburban roadside, and then to carry it away to some parochial dust-heap.


But for the vigilance of Vestries, grass would reconcile everything. When the first heat of the summer was over, a few nights of rain altered all the colour of the world. It had been the brown and russet of drought—very beautiful in landscape, but lifeless; it became a translucent, profound, and eager green. The citizen does not spend attention on it.

Why, then, is his vestry so alert, so apprehensive, so swift; in perception so instant, in execution so prompt, so silent in action, so punctual in destruction? The vestry keeps,

its beginning, even though the intention be towards a point while the first spring of the line is towards an opening curve. But man does not care for intention; he mows it. Nor does he care for attitude; he rolls it. In a word, he proves to the grass, as plainly as deeds can do so, that it is not to his mind. The rolling, especially, seems to be a violent way of showing that the universal grass interrupted by the life of the Englishman is not as he would have it. Besides, when he wishes to deride a city, he calls it *grass-grown*.

But his suburbs shall not, if he can help it, be *grass-grown*. They shall not be like a mere Pisa. Highgate shall not so, nor Peckham.

A WOMAN IN GREY

HE mothers of Professors were indulged in the practice of jumping at conclusions, and were praised for their impatience of the slow process of reason.

Professors have written of the mental habits of women as though they accumulated generation by generation upon women, and passed over their sons. Professors take it for granted, obviously by some process other than the slow process of reason, that women derive from their mothers and grandmothers, and men from their fathers and grandfathers. This, for instance, was written lately: "This power [it matters not what] would be about equal in the two sexes but for the influence of heredity, which turns the scale in favour of the woman, as for long generations the surroundings and conditions of life of the female sex have developed in her a greater